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Media Monitor

Center for Media and Public Affairs • 2101 L Street, NW • Suite 405 • Washington, D.C. 20037 202-223-2942

Volume V Number 4 April 1991

The Instant Replay War

Television News Coverage of the Persian Gulf War

This month's *Media Monitor* examines the biggest news story in television history. During 42 days of armed conflict from January 17 through February 27, the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts broadcast 1,733 stories on the Gulf War with a combined airtime of 53 hours 33 minutes. We analyzed the topics, sources, and the opinion debate on the combatants and their policies. We also examined all "visuals" or camera shots of the conflict and the damage it caused.

Media Monitor (Copyright 1991) is published ten times a year by the Center for Media and Public Affairs, a nonpartisan and nonprofit research organization. The Center conducts scientific studies of how the media treat social and political issues. Yearly individual and organizational subscriptions are available.

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Major findings:

■ **Cheers for the Troops** 95% of sources praised the performance of the U.S. military. The Patriot missile alone was praised 52 times. *Page 4*

■ **Jeers for the Pols** A majority of sources criticized George Bush, and three out of five criticized U.S. government policies in the Gulf. *Page 4*

■ **No War is Good War** A majority of sources opposed the war both before and after hostilities commenced. *Page 5*

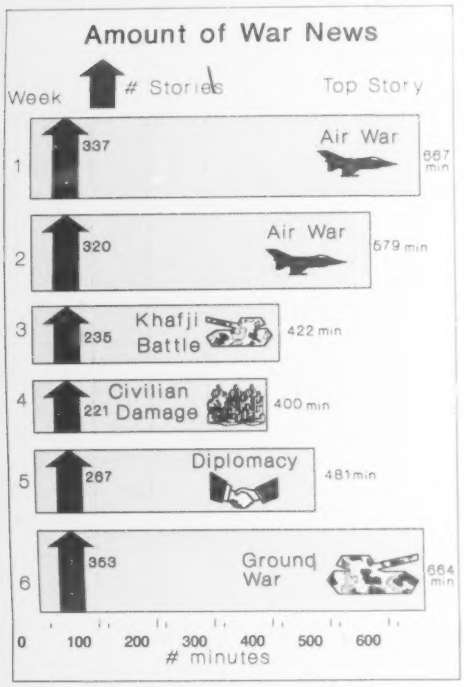
■ **Protest News** Anti-war protests got nearly twice as much coverage as pro-war demonstrations. *Page 5*

■ **The Non-Nintendo War** The networks aired more visuals of civilian damage than of air and ground combat combined. *Page 5*

■ **Anti-War ABC** ABC was the network most likely to air criticisms of U.S. leadership and policy and to quote Iraqi sources. *Page 6*

TV's Top Story

The Persian Gulf crisis triggered more network news stories in a shorter period of time than any event in television's history. From Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2 through the allied cease-fire on February 27, ABC, CBS, and NBC broadcast 4,383 Gulf-related stories on their evening newscasts, with a total airtime of 126 hours 29 minutes. Thus, the three major networks together averaged about 20 Gulf stories lasting 36 minutes per night over a seven month period. By comparison, the 1988 Presidential campaign yielded only 2,301 news stories over 22 months.



Coverage of the war itself produced 1,733 stories lasting 53 hours 33 minutes during 42 evenings of scheduled newscasts, not including the many special broadcasts at other times. War coverage averaged 14 stories lasting 25 minutes per network per night, more than the entire normal network evening newscast. (Many wartime broadcasts were expanded to an hour.) The leading news topic was the air war (339 stories), followed closely by reports about ground action (303 stories). Other major topics included discussions of Allied war strategy (205 stories), diplomatic efforts to end the war (189 stories), and the war's effect on Israel and the Palestinians (173 stories). A summary of coverage for each week of the war:

"Sanitizing the war (to keep)... support for the war high is almost criminal."
-Walter Cronkite
CNN, 1/25

"The networks... have been covering this conflict as if it were a miniseries. Order a pizza and watch a building disappear."

-Philip Caputo,
New York Times,
2/24

Week One: January 17-23 The outbreak of war pre-empted the evening newscasts on January 16 and set off an unprecedented 42 continuous hours of war news. During the first week's scheduled evening newscasts alone, the networks broadcast 337 war-related stories lasting more than 11 hours. Most of the coverage focused on the start of the air campaign (120 stories) and on Israel's role in the war following Iraq's Scud attacks (72 stories).

Week Two: January 24-30 The coverage remained heavy (320 stories) but the focus became more varied. Leading topics were the air war (56 stories), civilian damage within both Iraq and Israel (33) and the oil spill in the Persian Gulf (26).

War Topics

1.	Air War	339
2.	Ground War	303
3.	Strategy & Tactics	205
4.	Diplomacy	189
5.	Israel & Palestinians	173
6.	Civilian Damage	141
7.	USSR	137
8.	Iraqi Military	133
9.	USA Home Front	125
10.	USA Weapons	107

Based on number of stories.

Week Three: January 31-February 6 As war news became more routine, network coverage dropped to 235 stories. The ground fighting in Khafji generated the most attention (42 stories).

Week Four: February 7-13 The Baghdad bunker bombing on February 13 helped to make civilian casualties the top news topic of the week, with 44 stories out of a total of 221.

Week Five: February 14-20 Iraq's offer to withdraw from Kuwait, coupled with mediation efforts by the Soviet Union, made diplomacy the week's leading topic with 71 stories. The focus of air war stories became battlfield

preparation; 39 stories were devoted to war strategy.

Week Six: February 21-27 The war's final week was also its most intensively covered--353 stories, an average of nearly 17 per network broadcast. The week began with furious attention to diplomacy (85 stories), followed by 131 stories on the hundred hour ground war that began February 24.

Rating the Players

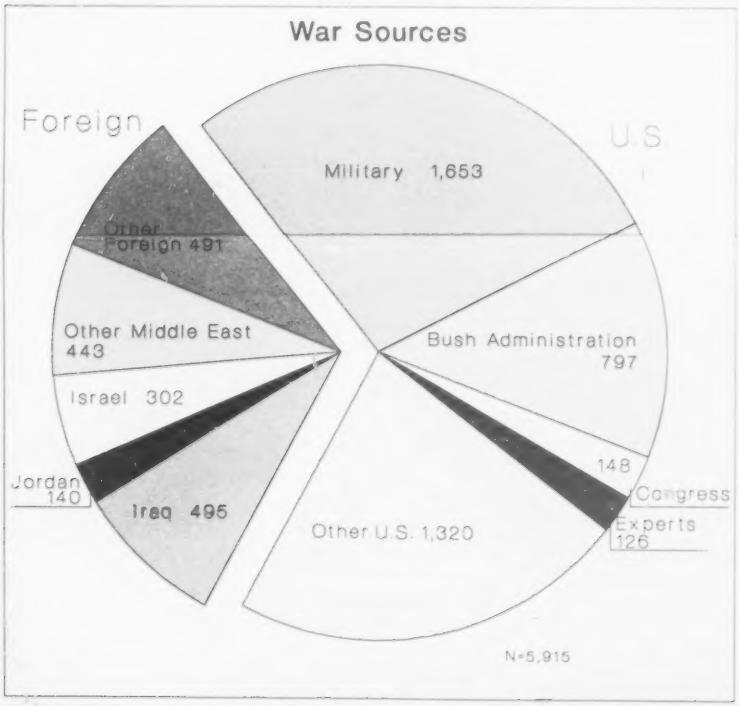
	Percent Positive	Number of Sources
George Bush	56%	70
Saddam Hussein	12%	138
Israel	74%	57
Soviet Union	50%	42
United States	41%	249
Iraq	37%	115
Coalition Allies*	30%	40
Germany/Japan	0%	19

*Includes Egypt, France, Great Britian, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and UAE.

War Sources

Military spokesmen and troops were by far the most frequent sources on TV news. Their 1,653 comments accounted for two out of every five American sources. More than 40 percent of the military sources (713) were the enlisted men and women and junior officers who presented a grunt's-eye view of the conflict. Another 360 statements came from senior officers in the field or at the Pentagon. The remainder were references to unidentified "Pentagon sources." Among the services, Marines were quoted the most often. Their 306 appearances outranked the Army's 262, despite frequent sound bites from Army Generals Powell (36) and Schwarzkopf (80). Air Force personnel were quoted only 159 times, and the Navy's only 75 times. The Bush administration was the source of another 797 statements, including 183 from President Bush and 62 from Secretary of Defense Cheney.

Among foreign sources, Iraqis were quoted most frequently, more than all of the United States' coalition partners combined (495 to 447 citations). Saddam Hussein was quoted 68 times, making him the third most frequently cited individual source, after Bush and Schwarzkopf. In contrast to the 495 quotes from Iraqi sources, television viewers heard from only 302 Israeli, 112 Kuwaiti, and 79 Saudi sources.

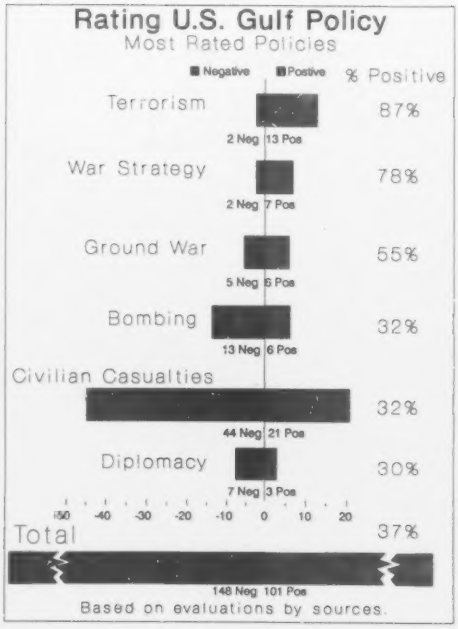


Rating the Combatants

Despite his visibility, TV news coverage of Saddam was highly negative. Only one out of eight sources who evaluated the Iraqi President provided words of praise, and those sources were predominantly his fellow Iraqis or Jordanians. For example, a Jordanian woman told CBS that, "Saddam Hussein is good....I love Saddam Hussein." (1/24) George Bush received a slight majority of positive comments (56%), with most of his support coming from Americans. More than ninety percent of U.S. sources had praise for Bush, while three out of four foreign sources criticized him. Much of the criticism of Bush was voiced by Iraqis, such as a government official who charged, "Bush is like Hitler and is a war criminal." (ABC, 2/14)

Israel's decision not to respond to Iraq's Scud attacks earned it praise from three out of four

TV news sources, the most positive profile among the Gulf War players. The Soviet Union, in the spotlight for its mediation efforts, received evenly balanced evaluations. The worst press of the conflict went to the Germans and the Japanese. They received unanimously negative evaluations for allegedly failing to support the coalition.



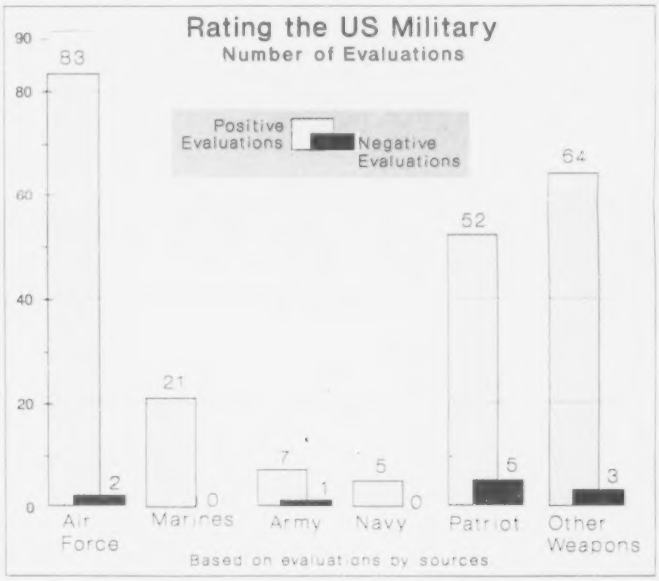
Surprisingly, the U.S. government fared little better than its Iraqi counterpart in the sound bite battle. Nearly three out of five sources (59%) criticized U.S. government policies during the war. Evaluations of the U.S. centered on the bombing campaign and the civilian damage it was causing in Iraq. More than a third of all evaluations of U.S. policy focused on those two categories, and 68 percent of those statements were critical. After the Iraqi bunker bombing, one Jordanian stated, "the U.S. people running this war are either liars or very stupid people. They may have smart bombs but they don't have very smart minds." (CBS, 2/12) Iraqi policy received even greater criticism - 63 percent negative comments from sources. The Iraqis were most often criticized for their Scud attacks on Israeli cities, the release of oil into the Persian Gulf and alleged atrocities in Kuwait.

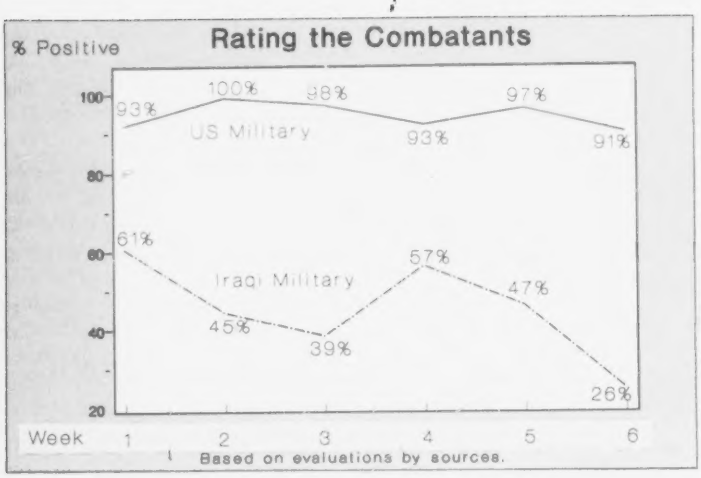
Rating the Warriors

The performance of the American military in the Gulf War yielded almost universally good press: 95 percent of the more than 300 sources who discussed this area praised the military's effectiveness in the war. CBS's Dan Rather summarized the first full day of the war: "In sports page language--this is not a sport, it's war--but, so far, it's a blowout." (1/17)

As the workhorse for much of the air war, the Air Force received the largest dose of praise (83 positive and only two negative evaluations). The Marine Corps, which acquired the media spotlight during the ground war as the Army vanished into the western Saudi desert, received unanimously positive ratings. Among weapons systems, the Patriot missile was the media darling, with 91 percent positive ratings. One U.S. serviceman called the Patriot "the king of air defense artillery right now, not only for the United States, but probably in all the free world." (NBC, 1/21)

The Iraq military also got fairly good ratings early on, but its reputation slid as the weeks passed. Four days into the war, a U.S. military briefer stated that the Iraqis possessed "some of the most formidable air defenses ever encountered." (ABC, 1/20) During the first week of the war, more than three out of five such estimations of Iraqi strength (61%) were positive. By the final week of the war, Iraq's military power had become the butt of jokes. "That an entire battalion would surrender to a bunch of helicopters," NBC military analyst James Dunnigan noted wryly, "certainly writes a new chapter in military history." (NBC, 2/21)





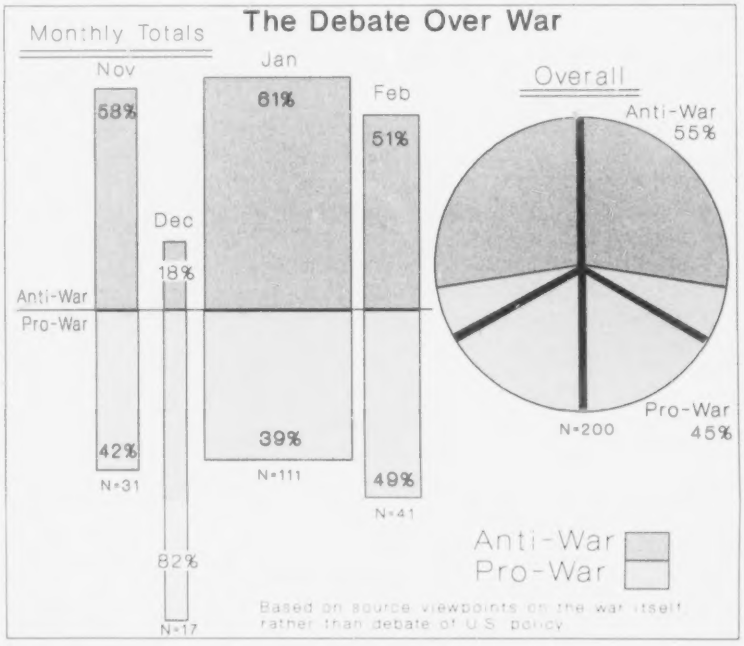
The predominance of anti-war voices was also reflected in television coverage of demonstrations. During the war, the networks broadcast 54 stories on anti-war demonstrations or protests, nearly double the number of stories (28) that focused on pro-war demonstrations. By contrast, a *Times Mirror* poll (released on January 31) found that three times as many Americans had attended pro-war rallies as anti-war rallies.

Although the networks showed more critics than supporters of the war, they described the public as generally supportive. When discussing public opinion, 84% of reporters stated that the public was backing the war. The remainder argued that the public was divided or stressed those groups that remained opposed to the war.

Rating the War

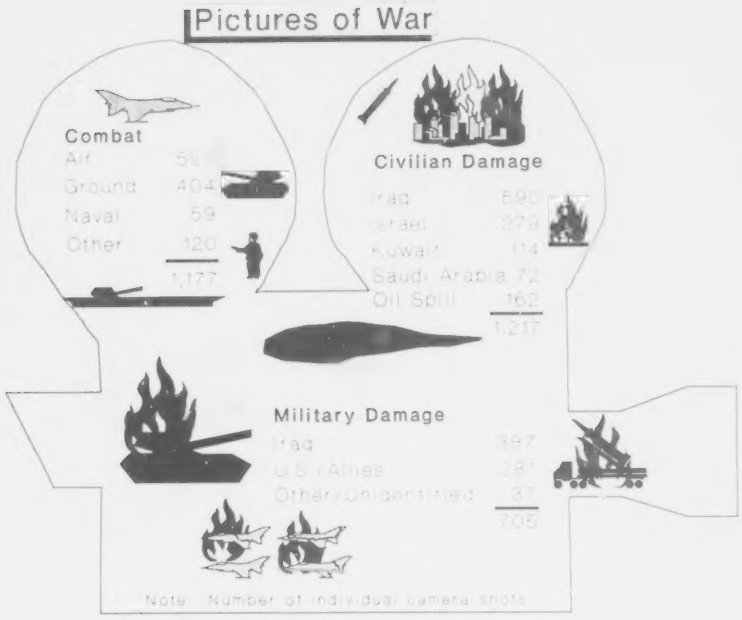
The debate over the Gulf War began not in January, but in November, with George Bush's decision to deploy additional forces to the Gulf. Among sources who debated the merits of using force during the next four months, more than half (55%) gave anti-war opinions. During the war itself, 57 percent of sources voiced opposition. Early coverage was critical of the war option; even Ronald Reagan's former Navy Secretary James Webb was among those opposed to war: "The President's error in sending so many troops should not be compounded by a further error of using them...." (NBC, 11/29) Only in December, with congressional hearings virtually over and most of the organized protests still a month away, did a majority of sources (82%) support armed intervention, although discussion of this issue was light.

In January, the debate moved into high gear, with the congressional vote on the use of force and reaction to the start of the war. The high level of debate in January also saw the lowest level of support for the war, as 61 percent of sources came out against the use of force. Said one U.S. Marine's mother: "I don't believe in war. I don't feel like sacrificing my son for oil." (CBS 1/14) Even as the war ended victoriously in February, the level of support among sources remained below 50 percent for the month.



Images of War

The most frequently televised images of the Gulf War were not of combat or military casualties, but of damage and injuries inflicted on civilians. We coded 1,217 individual camera shots of non-military damage, nearly thirty such visuals per night. Nearly



half (48%) of these shots showed damage to civilian areas inside Iraq. Under a quarter (23%) focused on images of destruction in Israel, and one in eight (13%) depicted the Persian Gulf oil spill. These pictures were far from antiseptic; 223 (or 18%) depicted human casualties, mostly from Iraq (151) and Israel (66).

Combat visuals also appeared frequently on the nightly news. The brevity of the ground war insured that most visual images depicted airborne combat. The networks featured 594 pictures of the air war, mostly camera shots from Allied planes, or Patriot missile launches over Israel or Saudi Arabia. Ironically, the number of air combat visuals virtually equalled the number of images of Iraqi civilian damage (590). Images of ground combat, mostly from the last days of the war, totalled 404 shots--just over a third of all combat visuals.

Despite the paucity of Allied casualties in the war, a large proportion of the military casualties shown on the networks were U.S. or coalition troops. Of the 130 shots of dead or wounded servicemen, more than two-thirds (91) were Allied casualties; Iraqi troops accounted for the remaining 39. The Iraqis were more often depicted as prisoners; 182 of the 258 visuals of POW's were of captured Iraqi soldiers. Overall, shots of Iraqi military damage (casualties and wreckage such as burning tanks) outnumbered shots of Allied military damage by 387 to 281.

ABC vs. Its Rivals

	ABC % Pos	Others' %Pos
George Bush	44%	60%
U.S. Policy	26%	49%
Pro-War Viewpoints	36%	49%
Israeli Gov't	60%	79%

	ABC	Others'
Stories on Civilian Damage	62	40
Iraqi Sources	212	142
Israeli Sources	79	112
Pictures of Israeli Damage	80	100

The ABC Difference

Although coverage by CBS and NBC was similar on most of our measures, ABC produced a distinctively anti-war profile. This reflects both the distribution of opinion and the selection of subject matter in ABC's war coverage. In the opinion debate, ABC proved more likely to air criticisms of U.S. policy and leadership than did CBS or NBC. Fewer than half of ABC's sources (44%) provided positive evaluations of President Bush. In contrast, 58 percent of NBC sources and 63 percent of CBS sources praised Bush. Similarly, three out of four evaluations of U.S. policy on ABC were negative. For example, Peter Jennings talked to the Iraqi Ambassador to the United Nations, who protested that the U.S. was "carpet bombing all cities and towns, killing children and ladies and elderlies and even sick people in hospitals." (ABC, 1/22) At the other networks, the policy debate was about evenly balanced--48 percent of sources on CBS and 50 percent on NBC supported U.S. Gulf policies. Sources on ABC were also less likely to praise Israel than were those on the other networks (60% vs. 79% combined positive ratings). Finally, opinion on the war itself was balanced on the other networks but nearly two to one negative on ABC.

We found similar gaps in the selection of topics, sources, and pictures. ABC aired half again as many stories on civilian damage as did either of its rivals. ABC quoted Iraqi sources half again as frequently as CBS and NBC but cited fewer Israeli sources and showed fewer visuals of damage to Israel from Scud attacks. Finally, ABC broadcast the most stories (20) on anti-war demonstrations.

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Volume V Number 5 May 1991

Reporting on Recession

How the Media Covered the Economic Downturn

How have the national media covered economic news during the current downturn? During the six months from October 1990 through March 1991, the *New York Times* and the three major television networks ran 957 stories dealing with economic issues. This month's *Media Monitor* analyzes the media's treatment of the current condition and future prospects of the economy.

Major findings:

- **Situation Serious...** 96% of sources gave a negative appraisal of current economic conditions. *Page 3*
- **But Not Hopeless** 43% of sources were optimistic about future economic developments. *Page 4*
- **CBS Bears vs. ABC Bulls** Three out of four sources at CBS forecast bad times ahead. Three out of five sources at ABC forecast better times. *Page 5*
- **"R" is for Repetition** Reporters used the term "recession" over 800 times. *Page 6*
- **Silver Linings Dept.** 94% of sources agreed that the economy was in recession. But two out of three believed the recession would be short or mild. *Page 5*
- **Northeast News** There was more discussion of conditions in the Northeast than in all other regions combined. *Page 3*

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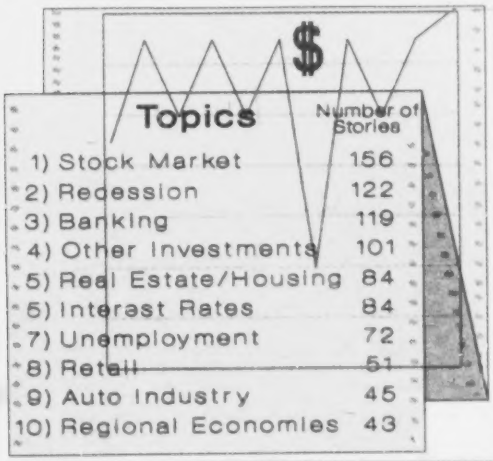
Leading Indicators

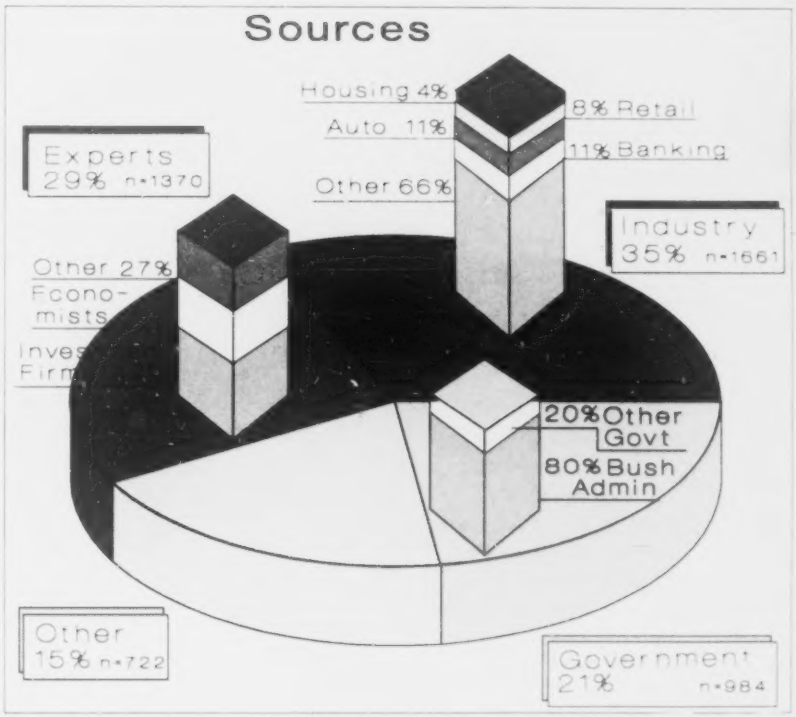
The economy is always newsworthy, and an economic recession is big news. Since last fall, the American economy has generated more news stories than any topic other than the crisis and subsequent war in the Persian Gulf. To examine the scope and contours of economic news, we analyzed 957 stories dealing with economic issues in the *New York Times* and television network newscasts from October 1, 1990 through March 31, 1991. During this six month period, the *Times* ran 618 stories on the economy, representing over 10,000 column inches of text. The three major network evening newscasts aired 339 stories, with a cumulative airtime of 8 hours 35 minutes. NBC led the way with 125 stories totalling 3 hours 36 minutes of airtime. ABC broadcast 110 stories (2 hours 20 minutes), and CBS aired 104 (2 hours 39 minutes).

Money Matters

The leading topic of concern was the stock market. The economic implications of market fluctuations generated 156 news stories. The second biggest story was the recession. Its causes, effects, and likely duration were the topic of 122 stories. Even the recession barely edged out the continuing attention given to problems in the banking industry (119 stories), led by concern over bank closings and the reluctance of banks to lend money. Other investment markets and opportunities, such as the bond and commodities markets, were the focus of an additional 101 stories.



Rounding out the top five topics, with 84 stories apiece, were the slumping real estate market (with special attention given to the Northeast), and the difficulties in borrowing money caused by high interest rates. Close behind was the problem of unemployment with 72 stories. Substantial coverage was also given to retail industries, hard hit by low consumer confidence (51 stories), the slumping auto industry (45), and reports that highlighted regional variations on the economic scene (43 stories).



Whose Views?

On most major news stories involving public policy, government officials serve as frequent sources of information and opinion. But government was a relatively minor player in making economic news. Local, state and federal government officials together accounted for only about one in five sources. Among the governmental voices that were heard, members of the Bush administration accounted for four out of every five. The most heavily quoted sources came not from government but from industry, which represented over one-third of

all sources. Among business sources, representatives of the banking and auto industries led the pack, each accounting for 11 percent of all industry sources. They were followed by retailers (8%) and representatives of the housing industry (4%). The other major source of economic information was a diverse group of experts from outside both government and the industries they assessed. These independent experts accounted for nearly three in every ten sources. The most frequently sourced experts were financial analysts with investment houses. Analysts at firms such as Bear, Stearns and Merrill Lynch accounted for 42 percent of all expert sources. The other major category of experts consisted of economists at universities, think-tanks, and other non industry settings.

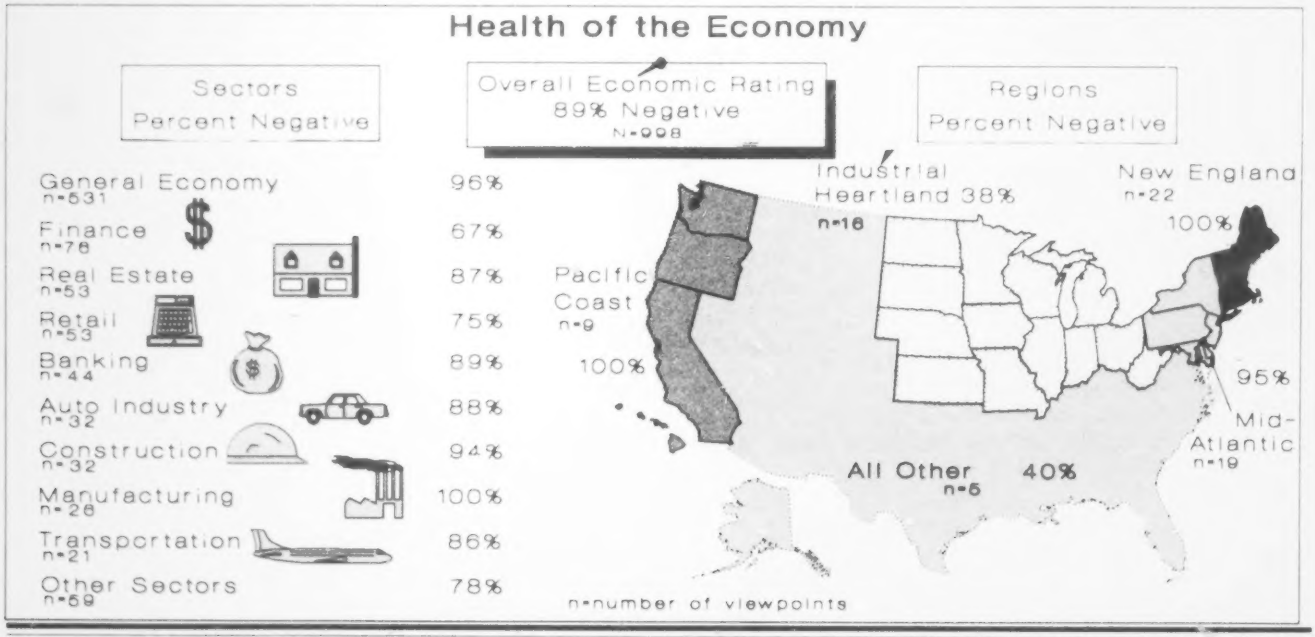
"It's like unemployed people are coming out of the sky, there are so many of them."

Massachusetts resident
N.Y. Times, 1/13/91

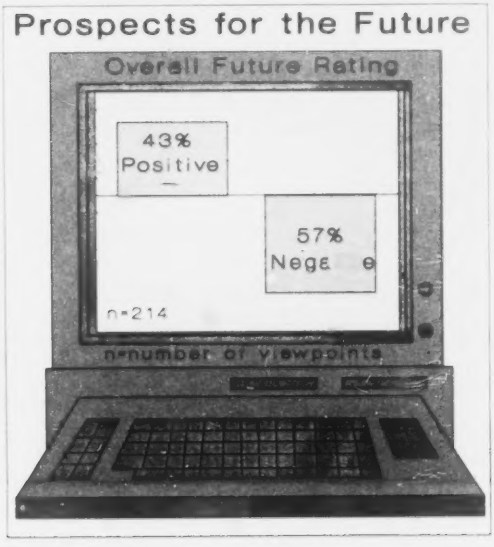
Bear Today...

The debate over the health of the economy revolved around the severity of the illness. As NBC's Mike Jensen put it, the question was "whether [the] fever can be knocked out with a couple of aspirin, or whether it will turn into pneumonia." (1/29/91) Nearly 1,000 sources offered an assessment of the overall economy or one of its major sectors. Their verdict was almost unanimously negative. Fully 96 percent turned thumbs down on the condition of the economy. One economist told ABC, "the economy ... almost looks as if it is sliding off a cliff." (12/7/90)

The sector by sector judgments were only slightly more sanguine. Two out of three sources were bearish on the condition of Wall Street. Three out of four rang up "no sale" on the retail trade. Ratings of real estate, banking, the auto industry, and transportation all neared the 90 percent negative mark. Among the many purveyors of gloom and doom, an automotive analyst called the current state of the auto industry "abysmal", the worst "since the recession of 1982." (NBC 3/2/91) Not to be topped, a banking analyst called that industry "in as weak a condition as it has been at any time since World War II." (CBS 12/18/91) And the CEO of Pan Am disdained comparisons, simply calling airline losses "staggering, frightening" and "a national crisis." (ABC 11/28/90) If these assessments seem sobering, consider that opinion on the construction industry was even more one-sided -- 94 percent negative. And among the 26 sources who commented, not a single one had a good word for the manufacturing sector -- it attracted 100 percent negative ratings. Nonetheless, when all viewpoints on economic sectors are added to those on the overall economy, the balance of opinion actually rises to "only" 89 percent negative overall.

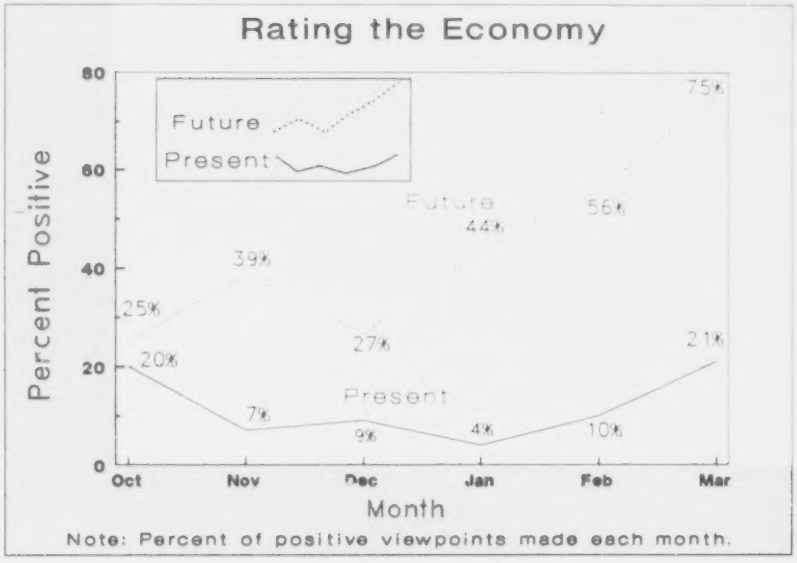


Portrayals of geographic regions were as downbeat as those of economic sectors. Out of fifty assessments of economic conditions in New England, the Mid-Atlantic states, and the Pacific Coast, a staggering 49 (98%) were negative. A government official's litany of New York's economic woes was typical: "unemployment is up, employment is down, and labor force participation is down. It's construction, it's trade, it's finance, it's manufacturing -- it's everything." (*New York Times* 2/2/91) Only conditions in the Industrial Heartland (the north central and midwestern states) elicited any real division of opinion, with 38 percent of sources voicing optimism about the region. But the greatest variation by region concerned the amount of attention rather than the economic verdict. There was more discussion of conditions in the Northeast, where these media outlets are all based, than in all other regions of the country combined.



...Bull Tomorrow

If sources were nearly unanimous in painting a bleak picture of today's economy, their forecasts of future developments were more diverse. A majority (57%) were bearish about the future, but that left a large minority (43%) who saw better times ahead. These proportions of bears and bulls were identical for both general economic conditions and sector-specific forecasts. Typical of the pessimists was an economist who told CBS on February 1, "the recession is not going to end this year. There is a growing possibility if not probability that this recession could continue into 1992." The optimists, while less than Panglossian, were not willing to concede a continued downturn. As one business leader told the *New York Times*, "Overall the light at the end of the tunnel may still be very dim, but it may very well be signaling that the worst is now behind us." (3/2/91)



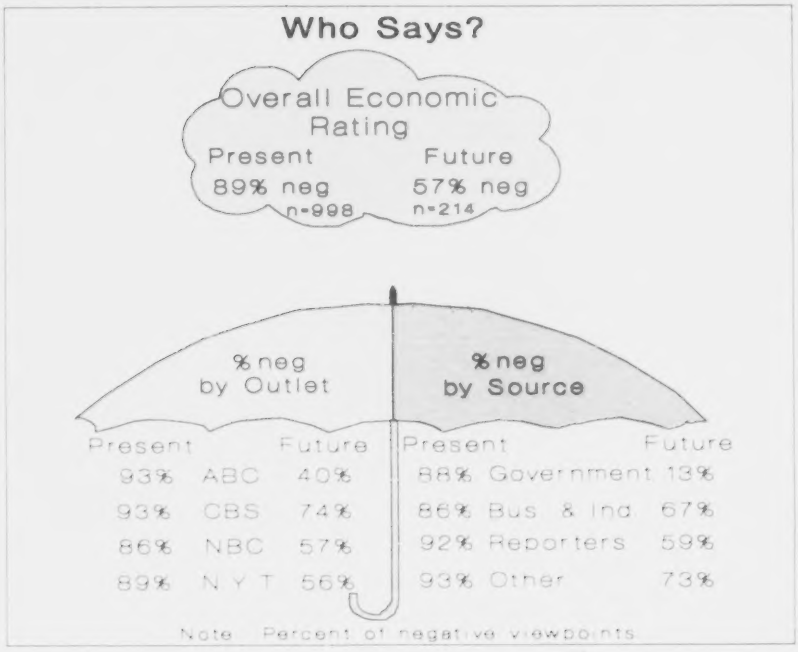
Assessments of the future were consistently more positive than those of the present, and the divergence grew over time. During October sources were almost as negative about the economy's prospects for improvement as they were about its current performance. Three out of four economic projections that month were negative, as were four out of five assessments of current conditions. Thereafter assessments of the current situation hit rock bottom, remaining at least 90% negative during the next four months, even as predictions became increasingly hopeful. In February a majority of all predictions were optimistic, while current assessments were still mired in pessimism. By March, in the afterglow of the Gulf War, three out of four predictions were positive, a complete turnaround from October's figures. For example, the subject of a "man in the street" interview told NBC, "the real estate market seems to be coming back.

There is a slow turnaround there, Wall Street seems to be coming around, and things are looking good." (3/21/91) Appraisals of current conditions were slower to turn around. They remained 79 percent negative in March, about the same as they had been the previous October.

Whose News?

The portrayal of America's economic straits was so unrelievedly grim that it hardly mattered where or from whom the audience got its news. Bad news predominated at all outlets and among all groups of sources. When it came to forecasting the future, however, there was greater diversity on both fronts. CBS was the network for naysayers, where nearly three out of four sources (74%) took a dim view of the nation's economic prospects. For example, on the second day into the new year, Ray Brady told viewers that private economists expected the recession to be "long and mean." He then brought on an economist who gave this gloomy forecast: "I think it will be in terms of bankruptcies and financial pain, as serious, if not more serious than any recession we've experienced since 1930." (1/2/91) The future looked much rosier on ABC, where three out of five sources saw better times ahead. Thus, Stephen Aug quoted a Commerce Department official, "by the second half (of the year) we expect considerable momentum behind the economy and substantial growth." (1/25/91) The mix of opinion at NBC and the *New York Times* fell about midway between ABC's optimism and CBS's pessimism.

There was an even sharper division of opinion among sources from the public and private sectors. On one hand, industry representatives, economic analysts, and reporters were all predominantly (though not overwhelmingly) downbeat about the economy's prospects. On the other side of the debate were government officials, whose sound bites were resolutely up-tempo. Seven out of eight government sources (87%) predicted better times ahead. This optimist's club was led by administration officials. For example, on February 7 the *Times* quoted President Bush,



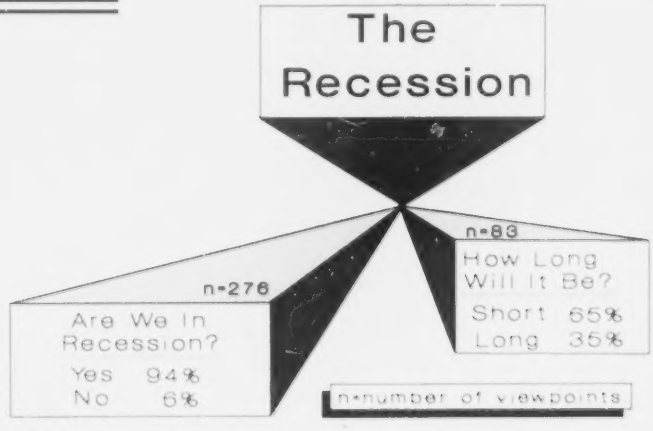
"the current recession does not signal any decline in the fundamental, long term health or basic virility of our economy. America is a can do nation."

"The mood of the country does seem to be changing. The crocuses are poking through."

-Mike Jensen
NBC, 2/28

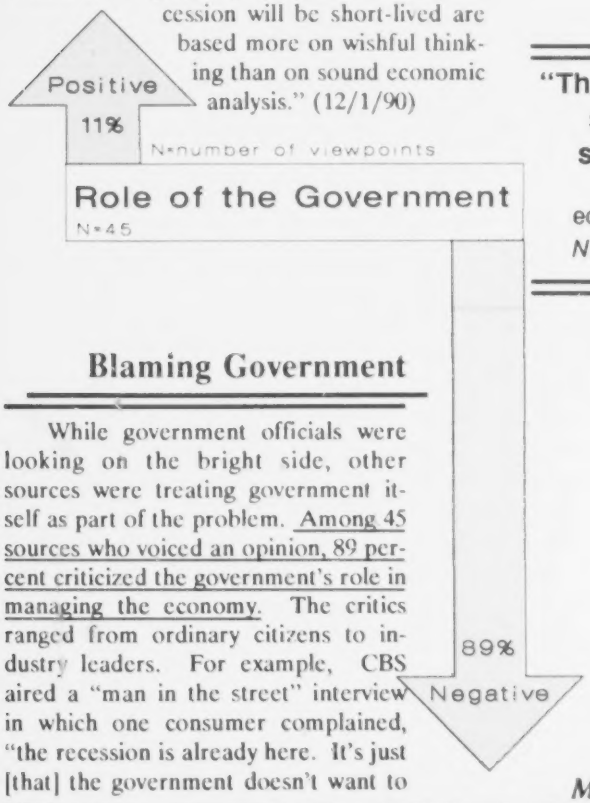
The "R" Word

The single question that was asked most frequently in the media was whether the long-awaited recession had arrived. This question gradually took on a rhetorical tone, because the answer was almost always "yes." Out of



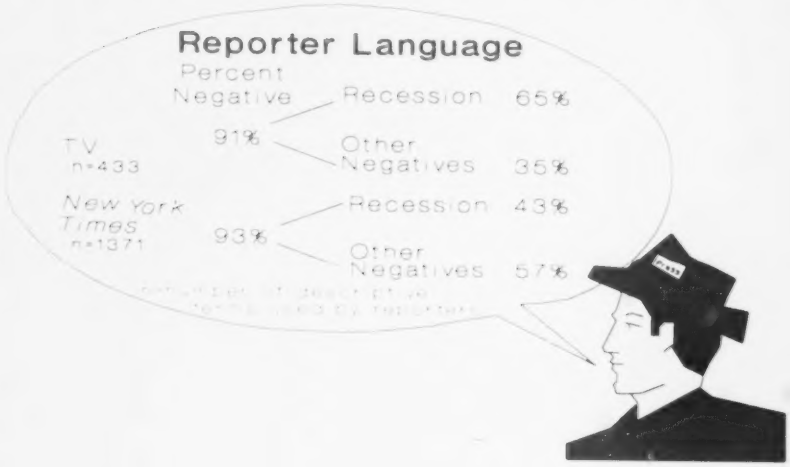
276 sources who addressed this issue, 94 percent concluded that the economy was in recession. On January 2, the *New York Times* reported that even Michael Boskin, the president's chief economic advisor, had reluctantly joined the chorus: "the country has probably entered a recession." With this widespread agreement that the country was in a recession, attention turned to its duration and severity.

The magnitude of the recession engendered a spirited debate in the media, with optimists for once gaining the upper hand. Two out of three sources argued that the recession would be short lived or not too painful. The most ardent supporters of this position were government officials; six out of seven (86%) downplayed the likely severity of the recession. Typical was an unnamed Bush administration official who told the *New York Times*, "we may already be in a recession, but it will be a mild and brief one." (11/4/90) In contrast to the optimism of government officials, representatives of the business world, along with independent experts, were about evenly split over the magnitude of the recession. For example, an official of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce argued, "predictions that the recession will be short-lived are based more on wishful thinking than on sound economic analysis." (12/1/90)



Blaming Government

While government officials were looking on the bright side, other sources were treating government itself as part of the problem. Among 45 sources who voiced an opinion, 89 percent criticized the government's role in managing the economy. The critics ranged from ordinary citizens to industry leaders. For example, CBS aired a "man in the street" interview in which one consumer complained, "the recession is already here. It's just [that] the government doesn't want to admit they've screwed up." (1/1/91) And the *New York Times* quoted a senior vice-president at an investment firm, "the Fed's action was too little and too late to adequately deal with the worsening recession." (2/2/91) Despite this criticism, the only praise directed at government during the entire six months went to the Federal Reserve Board.



"The economy is sinking and sinking fast."

economist
N.Y. Times, 2/12

Bad Language

To better convey the flavor of economic reporting, we noted not only the arguments that were aired but also the language that reporters used to describe the economy. (We excluded terms that were used by sources.) Out of over 1,800 descriptive terms employed by reporters, only 8 percent were positive words or phrases such as "sound," "vigorous," or "efficient." The other 92 percent included such negative terms as "unhealthy," "decline," and "recessionary." In fact, some variant of the term "recession" was employed 801 times. Television reporters were especially likely to employ the "r-word". The term "recession" accounted for 60 percent of all the descriptive language used to characterize the economy on television. By contrast, "recession" accounted for only 39 percent of the descriptive language that appeared in the *New York Times*.

The topic of the June/July issue of *Media Monitor* will be the media's coverage of health policy issues.

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Media Monitor

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Volume V Number 6 June/July 1991

Our Sick Health Care System

Media Coverage of the Health Care Policy Debate

Health issues are a leading source of news and a growing source of public debate. This month's *Media Monitor* analyzes media coverage of the health care policy debate from October 1990 through April 1991. We examined 447 news stories, including 251 articles in the *New York Times* and 196 stories on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts. The topics ranged from AIDS and tobacco to insurance coverage and the costs of health care.

Major findings:

- **A Sick System** Most sources rated America's health care services as inadequate. *Page 2*
- **Cost-Ineffective** Sources unanimously condemned the high cost of both health care and health insurance. *Page 3*
- **Private Practices** Seven out of eight sources criticized the private sector. Drug companies were the most frequent targets. But insurance companies got 100% bad press. *Page 3*
- **The National Health** Four out of five sources criticized government health care programs. Only the anti-smoking campaign got a good press. *Page 4*
- **Faulting the Feds** State-level programs got better press than federal programs, especially on television news. *Page 4*
- **Medic-Aid** Most sources argued for government intervention. Four out of five urged the government to spend more money on health care. *Page 5*

Media Monitor (Copyright 1991) is published ten times a year by the Center for Media and Public Affairs, a nonpartisan and nonprofit research organization. The Center conducts scientific studies of how the media treat social and political issues. Yearly individual and organizational subscriptions are available.

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The Health Beat

Health issues have become a leading source of domestic news. In 1990 the health beat finished fourth on the network news agenda, after the Persian Gulf, the Soviet Union, and the American economy. This month we focus on the policy issues involved in the ongoing health care debate. We examined all stories dealing with health care policy in the network evening newscasts and the *New York Times* from October 1, 1990 through April 30, 1991. This period includes debate over the 1991 and 1992 budget proposals, which highlighted the federal government's role in health care. There were renewed debates over handling the AIDS epidemic as well as concern for mental health care, children's health care and veterans' medical care.

Researchers analyzed 447 stories on health care policy issues. The majority of them -- 251 articles -- appeared in the *New York Times*. The three network evening newscasts aired 196 stories for a total of 5 hours and 34 minutes of airtime. ABC's 79 stories topped the competition, followed by CBS with 62 stories and NBC with 55.

The Nation's Chart

News on health care policy debates was led by the battle against AIDS. Disclosures that health care workers might be infected, along with a widely-reported international conference, helped make AIDS the topic of 84 stories. Debate over the federal budget included changes to Medicaid and Medicare, which were the subject of 57 stories. Providing health care and insurance coverage for America's children was discussed in 55 stories. Women's health concerns were addressed in 48 stories. The costs, availability and security of private insurance policies were debated in 44 stories. The top ten topics also included the debate over the right to die and the adverse health effects of smoking (26 stories apiece); the soaring costs of health care (24), the problem of supplying health care to the poor (23), and finally, discussions of medical ethics (22).

Topics	Number of Stories
1) AIDS	84
2) Medicare/Medicaid	57
3) Children's Health Care	55
4) Women's Health Care	48
5) Private Insurance	44
6) Euthanasia	26
6) Smoking and Health	26
8) Costs of Health Care	24
9) Poverty and Health Care	23
10) Medical Ethics	22

Based on number of stories.

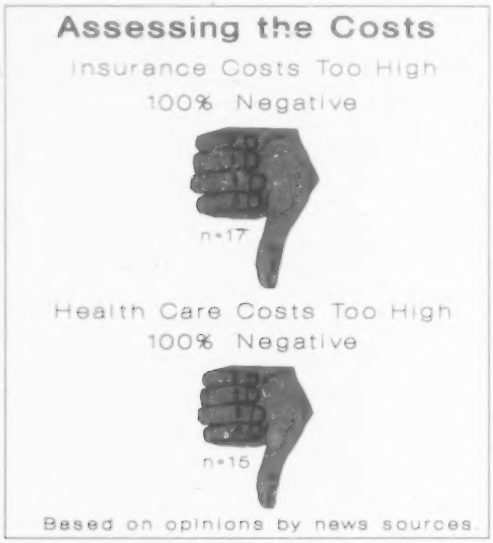
Hazardous...

There were 96 opinions on the quality of health care that Americans receive. These assessments covered a wide range of services, but in the majority of cases (56%), the quality was found wanting. Among the sources who offered clear opinions, 79 percent criticized the quality of care provided for veterans. Sources held a similarly poor opinion of urban health care (78 %) negative). Only health care services to the poor and members of minority groups attracted worse ratings -- 100% negative. Health care in rural areas and emergency medical services were found wanting by two out of three sources (67%). Prenatal care, health care for women, and community based clinics were criticized by three out of five sources (60%).

Only two areas of health care enjoyed even a modicum of approval in the news: services for the elderly and AIDS programs. Half of those with clear opinions thought that care for the elderly was adequate. Programs to deal with AIDS were endorsed by 60 percent of sources.

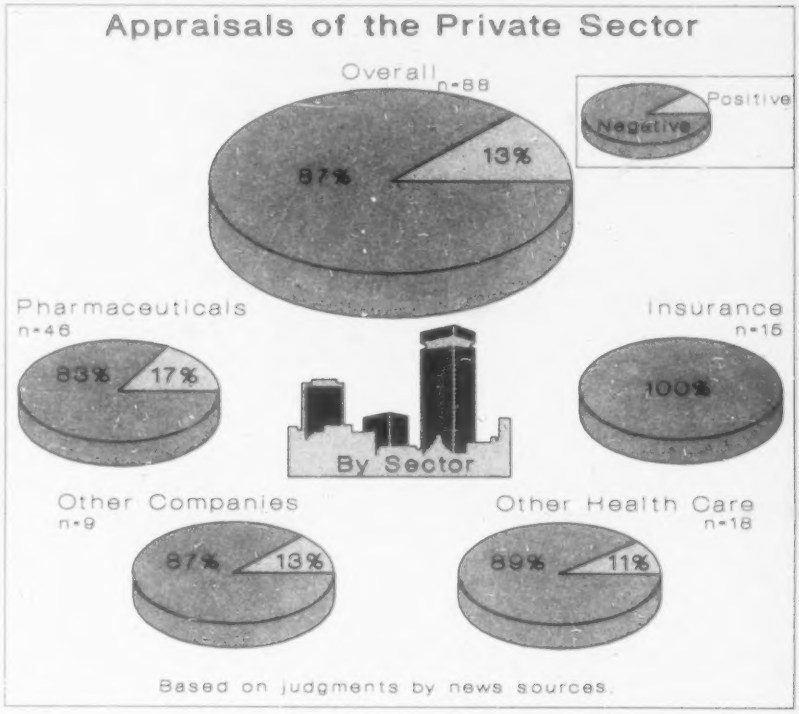
... To Your Wealth

If opinion was mixed on the quality of care, it was unanimous on the price. Every source who expressed an opinion on the cost of either health care or health insurance found the prices out of line. Not one of the 32 sources who were quoted attempted to justify the costs of the current system of providing health care. For example, *New York Times* reporter Philip Hilts noted, "The United States health-care system is the most expensive in the world..." (4/8/91) In proposing new Medicare reimbursement rules, federal officials argued, "an explosion of high-cost medical technologies' has made it necessary to consider cost in deciding whether to [pay the bill]." (*New York Times* 4/21/91)



Private Problems

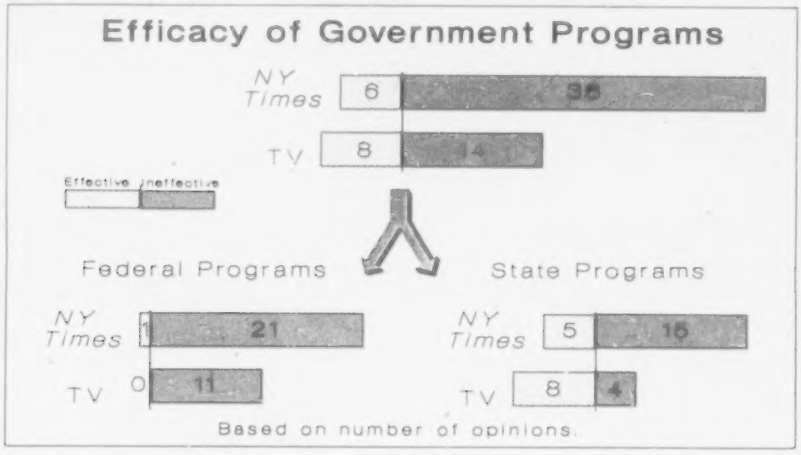
Private industry played the part of a villain in this tale of inadequate and overpriced care. The private sector was criticized for its performance by seven out of eight sources. For the industries under discussion, the coverage ran the gamut from bad to worse. The pharmaceutical industry was the most frequently targeted. Drug companies were the focus of 46 opinions, 83 percent of which were criticisms. For instance, Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) charged, "Pharmaceutical companies are spending larger sums on questionable tactics that subvert basic medical standards..." (*New York Times* 12/12/90) In another article a U.S. Attorney charged, "The generic drug industry is corrupted by companies that took shortcuts to get drugs approved, including bribing regulators..." (*New York Times* 12/20/90)



Other companies fared even worse. Almost nine out of ten evaluations of health care concerns (89%) were critical. For instance, a hospital director offered this low opinion of his colleagues: "Some private non-profit hospitals are making unbelievable amounts of money, not paying any taxes and not using the money for research, education or charity work." (*New York Times* 12/18/90). Companies that were not in the health care business did about as badly (87% criticism). Among these, tobacco and alcohol companies were high profile targets. For example, one anti-smoking activist charged, "There is something especially sinister in the way the tobacco companies link healthy sporting life with tobacco." (*New York Times* 4/11/91).

The worst press of all went to the insurance industry, which received universal criticism (100%) on several fronts. Thus, a gay activist

complained, "The private insurance sector has been all too successful at avoiding its share of the costs of AIDS care" (*New York Times* 12/19/90). A doctor observed more mildly, "Insurance is supposed to be about sharing the risk, but nobody wants to share with those who need sharing with." (*New York Times* 4/28/91)



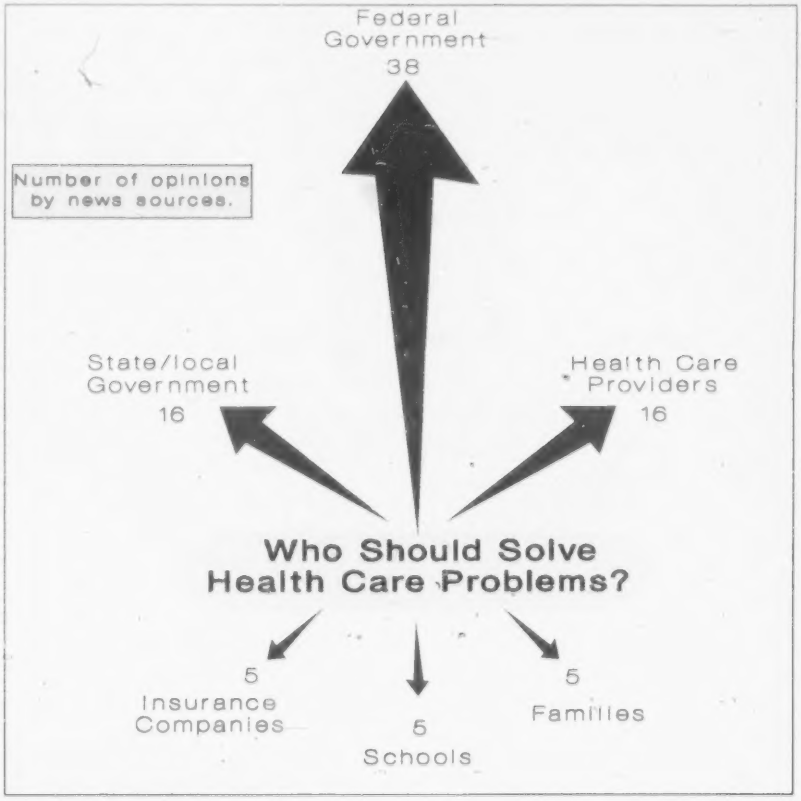
Federal Foibles

The public sector fared almost as badly as private industry in the court of media opinion. Nearly four sources in five (78%) argued that existing government sponsored health care programs were ineffective. Among the frequently discussed program areas, only one (anti-smoking efforts) was viewed as effective by more than half the sources discussing it. Eight out of ten agreed that Medicare/Medicaid was ineffective. For instance, an insurance executive observed, "Medicaid for the indigent is in a shambles." (*New York Times* 10/23/90) Regulation of nursing homes and government attempts to control health care costs were seen as ineffective by three out of four sources.

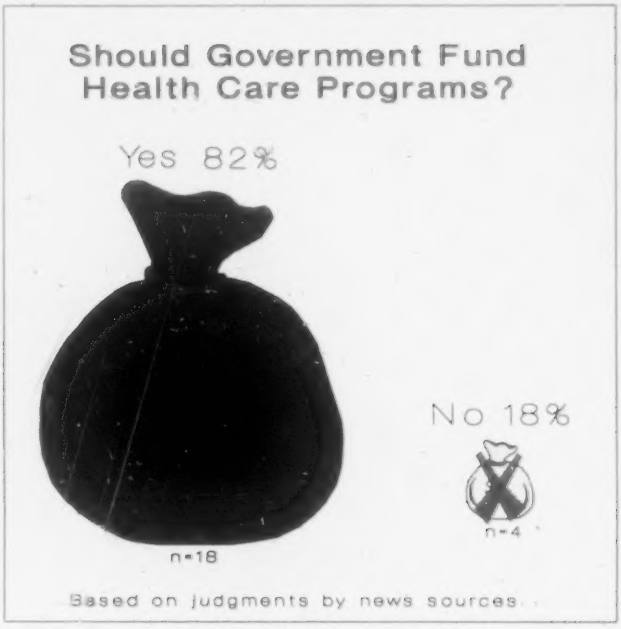
Only two government health care initiatives received balanced or positive coverage. First, programs and policies to control the costs of long term care were seen as effective by half of the sources debating them. Second, the media found one bright spot amid the gloom. Government efforts to reduce smoking were seen as effective by three out of four sources. ABC's Brian Rooney noted survey results showing that, "there are 750,000 fewer smokers than there were two years ago, and (government-sponsored) advertisements helped convince people to kick the habit." (11/14/90)

Although the bulk of coverage was critical, government programs fared better on television than in print. On the nightly newscasts, over one out of three sources (36 %) defended the efficacy of existing efforts. In the pages of the *New York Times* only one out of seven (14%) did so. For instance, the consumer advocacy organization Public Citizen charged that the federal government had failed to prevent the dumping of poor patients: "The meager enforcement record represents a serious failure of its responsibility to punish violators" (*New York Times* 4/24/91).

There were also significant differences in the ratings of state and federal government programs. Over two out of five sources (41%) argued that state-level programs were effective. By contrast, federal programs received support from only one of 33 sources, a minuscule three percent positive rating. While federal programs were almost always dismissed on all outlets, state programs received more praise than criticism on television news. Opin-



ion over the airwaves came down two to one in praise of state health care programs. In the *New York Times*, by contrast, three out of four sources criticized state-run programs. For example, a New Jersey state official described the state's method of covering the uninsured as "terminal" and argued "the system is just collapsing." (*New York Times* 11/21/90)



Public Solutions

If government's current efforts were found wanting, it was seen as the most likely source of future improvements. When newsmakers assessed responsibility for dealing with the nation's health care problems, they usually turned to the public sector. The federal government received by far the most attention (38 mentions), followed by state and local governments and health care providers (hospitals and doctors), with 16 mentions apiece. Trailing well behind were insurance companies, school systems and families, each of which were mentioned five times.

children will produce a better workforce." (*New York Times* 11/4/90)

Just as they endorsed government funding in principle, sources backed increased spending levels in practice. More than four out of five (82%) asserted that government was not spending enough on health care programs. Among the dissenters, 10 percent argued that the current level of government funding was adequate, while eight percent felt the government was already spending too much.

The most heavily discussed areas of funding were the Medicare and Medicaid programs, which were mentioned 18 times. Most sources (83%) found Medicare/Medicaid

A Matter of Money

With so much responsibility being placed on government to solve health care problems, it is not surprising that sources overwhelmingly backed government funding for health care programs. By a margin of more than four to one (82% vs 18%) sources agreed that government should fund health care programs. Most frequently mentioned as deserving funding were methods of handling toxic waste and Medicare/Medicaid programs. A health care policy expert at the Chamber of Commerce typified their thinking, "Expansion of Medicaid to cover additional poor

spending inadequate, but some argued that government was already spending too much. For example, *New York Times* reporter Jason DeParle explained the zero sum game played with health care funding, "[Medicare] spending cramps other social spending, leaving less to build housing, fight infant mortality, provide better schools, battle drug abuse and otherwise invest in our future." (*New York Times* 10/12/90) Among other topics of debate, increased spending on AIDS treatments and children's health care attracted unanimous support from news sources.

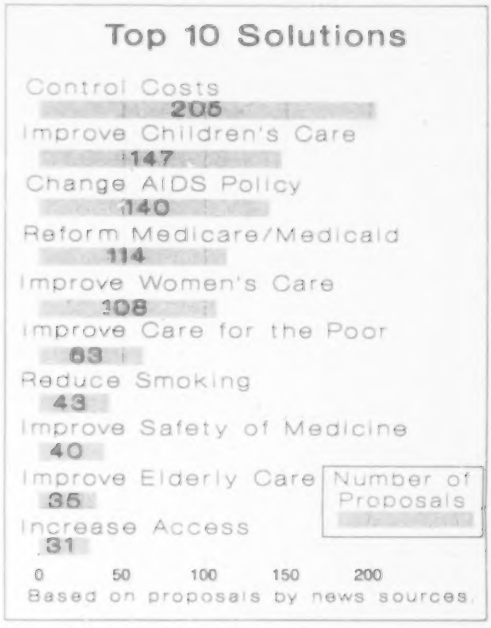
Take Two Aspirin

A major focus of news coverage was the search for solutions to America's health care problems. We identified over 1,000 proposals covering almost 200 different ideas. Among this vast group, solutions focused most heavily on five areas: proposals to control the costs of insurance and health care, health care services for children, remedies for the AIDS epidemic, reforming Medicare or Medicaid, and health services for women.

Of the 205 proposals to control the costs of health insurance or health care services, the most common were: standardizing so-called "medigap" policies to make them more affordable (16 mentions), utilizing medical review panels to control the number and cost of procedures (14 mentions), reducing the number of mandatory services included in group insurance policies, requiring employers to provide health insurance, and creating a state sponsored insurance plan for the uninsured (each mentioned 12 times).

Suggestions to improve children's health care focused on: programs to distribute condoms to control disease and pregnancy (52 mentions), improving childhood immunizations (24 mentions) and teaching children to abstain from sex (12 mentions).

Proposals for handling the AIDS epidemic were the most headline-grabbing set of solutions, with proposals heavily focused on testing health care workers. All told, 76 proposals suggested some form of testing and procedural changes for infected health care workers. More controversial solutions ranged from government dispensing of clean needles, condoms and bleach supplies to drug users (10 mentions) to barring people with the HIV virus from entering the U.S. (11 mentions).



Companies in the News

	Number of Stories
Blue Cross/Blue Shield	17
Metropolitan Life	10
Burroughs Wellcome	7
Traveller's Corp	6
Aetna	5
Philip Morris Co.	5
Roussel-Uclaf	4
Prudential Insurance	4
RJR Nabisco	4
Bristol-Meyers Squibb	4

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Media Monitor

Volume V Number 7 August/September 1991

Saving the Children

Media Coverage of Children's Welfare Issues

How have the media covered children's welfare issues? To find out we analyzed all stories on children that appeared in the television network newscasts, the *Washington Post*, and the weekly news magazines during the first six months of 1991. We examined 353 news items, including 144 stories broadcast on the ABC, CBS, and NBC nightly news, 153 articles in the *Washington Post*, and another 56 in *Time*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report*.

Major findings:

- **Bad News** Four out of five sources criticized the Bush administration's handling of children's issues. *Page 5*

- **Worse News** 82 percent of sources gave the American education system a failing grade. *Page 5*

- **Better News** Policies favored by liberals fared better than those put forth by conservatives... *Page 4*

- **More News** But conservative policies were debated more than three times as often as liberal ones. *Page 4*

The Clarence Thomas Nomination

- **Borking Thomas** Clarence Thomas's news coverage was more negative than Robert Bork's pre-hearing coverage in 1987. *Page 6*

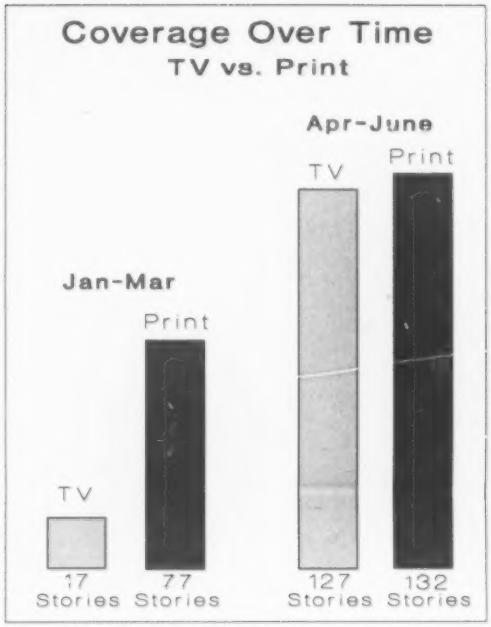
- **Whose News?** Thomas's coverage was more positive in the *Washington Post* and CNN than the *New York Times* and the "big three" TV networks. *Page 6*

Child - Centered News

The plight of American children came to the forefront of the news agenda during 1991. With attention drawn to the crisis facing Kurdish children after the Persian Gulf war, along with a long anticipated report from the National Commission on Children, the news media focused coverage on the youngest members of our society.

We analyzed all stories about children from January through June of this year. Included in the study were the evening newscasts of the three television net works, the *Washington Post*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*. Television aired 144 stories on the topic with a cumulative airtime of six hours and 27 minutes. Largely due to a weeklong special focus on children during June, ABC led its competitors by airing 47 percent of all TV pieces (67 stories, 2 hrs and 56 min). CBS followed with 49 stories, but featured longer stories on average; two hours and 21 minutes of coverage. NBC aired 28 stories running one hour and ten minutes.

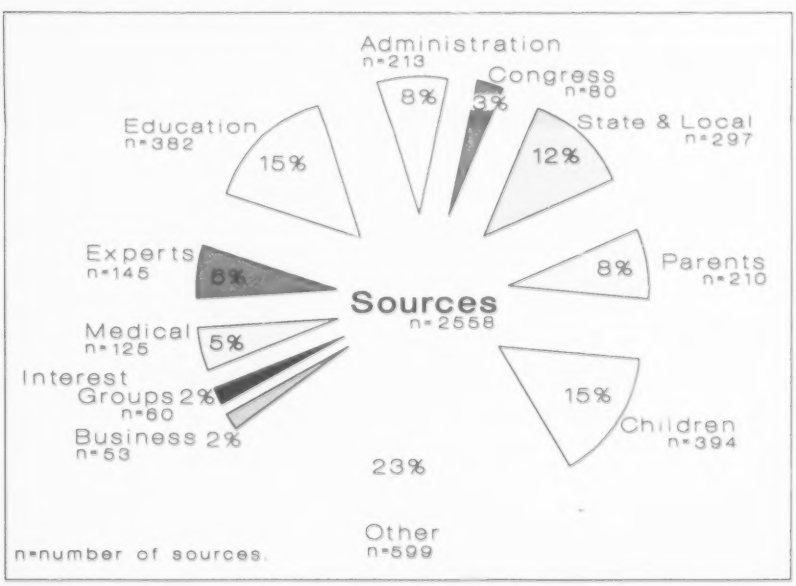
The *Washington Post*, because of its local as well as national focus, featured far and away the most coverage of children's issues (153 stories, over 3300 column inches). The news magazines together totaled only 56 articles. (*Newsweek*'s special issue on children boosted its coverage. In fact, this issue alone accounted for a majority of all magazine stories.)



Casualties of War

While innocence may be the first casualty of war, news coverage of the innocents was a casualty of the most recent war. Our study found fewer than one hundred stories (94) about children during the first three months of this year. In fact, television aired only 17 during this period.

The constraints faced by television news in wartime were made clear by the dramatic increase in coverage from April through June. While coverage picked up in both television and print, the networks lagged far behind (17 vs 77 stories) early on, yet achieved virtual parity with print (127 vs 132 stories) in the later months.



Look Who's Talking

The news media quoted or cited children more often than any other single category of sources. Family members, those most involved in the welfare of children, accounted for 23 percent of all sources. Children were the most numerous (15%), followed by parents (8%).

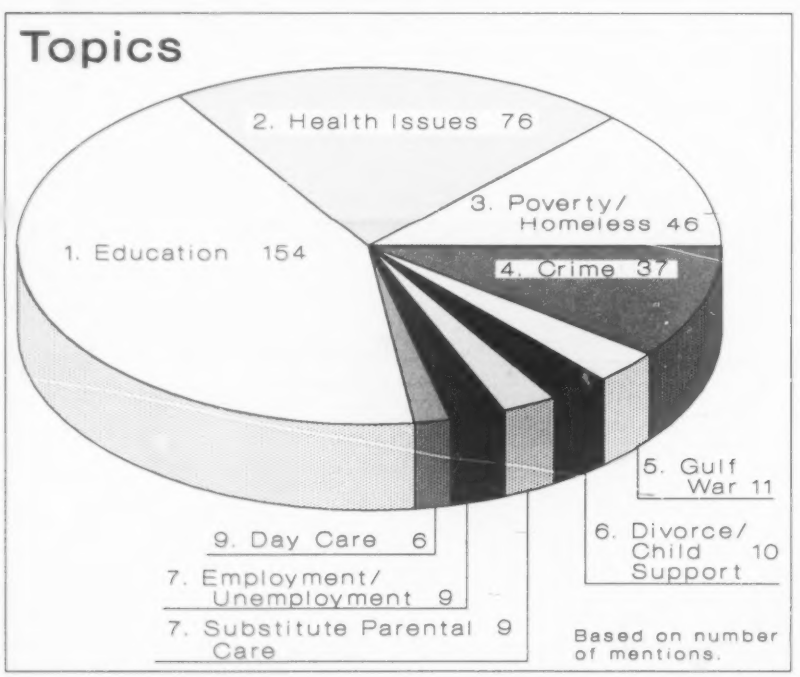
Government officials were cited about as frequently as family members, 590 times or 23 percent of all sources. Unlike most policy discussions, however, the bulk of these voices did not come from Washington. State and local governments with 297 mentions (12% of all sources) were quoted more times than the administration and the Congress (213 and 80 citations respectively) combined.

Sources from educational institutions, such as teachers and principals, spoke 382 times or 15 percent of the total, while experts (such as scholars at "think tanks") were featured six percent of the time. Medical sources (5%), interest groups (2%), and business sources (2%) filled out the list of sources.

From Tots to Teens

Education was the preeminent issue in news about children. Budgetary problems and innovations in schooling contributed to the 154 discussions of educational issues. This was more than twice the attention given to children's health issues (76 appearances), the next most frequently featured topic. Discussions of crack babies, AIDS prevention, and immunizations all contributed to this tally. The plight of poor and homeless children (46 discussions) struggling with problems of nutrition, and the lack of a stable family unit, ranked third. Crime news (37 mentions) included discussions of juvenile crime and prevention (16 stories), as well as crimes perpetrated against children (such as child abuse and neglect, 15 stories). Finally, the culture of crime and violence in which many children live was the subject of six stories.

A second tier of topics included discussions of the Persian Gulf war (11 stories), which was said to be having a negative effect on children, and issues concerning divorce and the need for stricter enforcement of child support payments (10 stories). Youth unemployment and substitute parental care, each with nine mentions, and day care (6 stories) rounded out the list of frequently discussed topics.

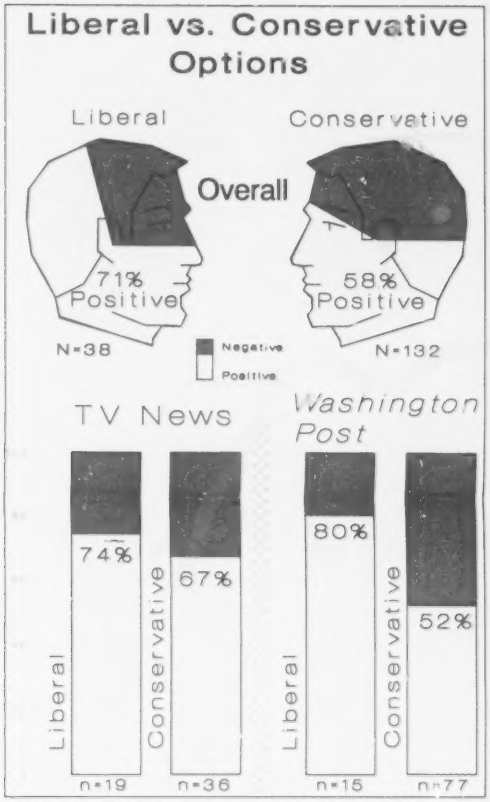


Tough Choices

The policy debate revolved around new proposals rather than the efficacy of existing programs. Further, the media dialogue was carried on mainly by sources who advocated their own alternatives rather than criticizing the competition. As a result, most proposals that were deemed newsworthy received relatively good press. Controversial policies ranging from standardized national testing to condom distribution programs were praised by large majorities of news sources. For instance, advocates of national testing outnumbered detractors by three to one (75% positive). Thus, the head of the National Endowment for the Humanities argued, "It is very important that we send a message to the education system that says to kids what your teachers are trying to teach you is important." (CBS 4/18) Tax credits to families with children were also frequently debated and received nearly unanimous support (90% positive). According to ABC's Rebecca Chase, "Changing the tax code would be a simpler way for government to offer middle class parents real help. It will be costly, but it may be the price of keeping families strong." (4/11) Proposals that offered students a choice of schools to attend received almost two to one positive coverage. A former New York City school official said choice can influence student performance because, "The key is ownership, and ownership comes from choice." (*U.S. News* 5/27)

Other policy options generated lively debate. Solutions such as magnet schools (69% positive), condom programs in schools (67% positive), and school uniforms (80% positive) all received passing grades. A few policy options, however, were soundly rejected. Corporal punishment was criticized by almost four out of five sources. As one psychologist argued, "School discipline should be instilled through the mind, not the behind." (*Washington Post* 4/11) The use of public tax dollars to support private schools (60% negative) and the policy of self-segregating schools to increase awareness of one's culture (57% negative) were panned by the majority of critics.

Some of these proposals, such as funding for "Head Start," received substantial support on both sides of the political spectrum. But others have a partisan cast. For example, tax vouchers for private school payments are favored mainly by conservatives, while support for self-segregated minority schools comes mainly from the political left. To determine how each side's pet proposals fared in the media, we compared evaluations of liberal options (parental leave, condom distribution, multiculturalism, etc.) with those of conservative options (corporal punishment, school "choice," stricter sentencing for juvenile offenders, etc.). Overall, liberal solutions fared better than conservative ones, by 71 percent to 58 percent good press. But both sides received support from a majority of sources evaluating them. Further, conservative proposals had far more visibility, generating 132 opinions compared to only 38 opinions on liberal proposals. Politically neutral or nonpartisan options got the best press of all -- 82 percent positive evaluations.



Policy Options

	% Pos	N
Increase "Head Start" Funding	100%	7
Fund Immunization	100%	8
Tax Credits to Families	90%	31
Uniforms in Schools	80%	10
National Test	75%	48
Day Care	71%	7
Magnet Schools	69%	16
Condom Programs	67%	12
School "Choice"	64%	33
Self-Segregated Schools	43%	7
Public Funds for Private Schools	40%	10
Corporal Punishment	22%	27

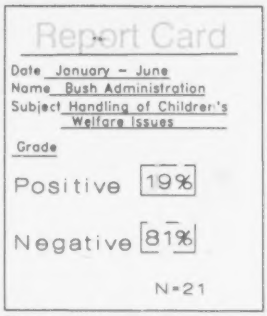
Based on opinions by news sources.

The different media carried somewhat different messages about partisan proposals. The television networks gave liberal solutions only slightly more favorable coverage (74% vs 67% positive). By contrast, sources in the *Washington Post* supported liberal views 80 percent of the time, compared to only 52 percent support for conservative notions. (Debate over these proposals in the news magazines was too infrequent to permit meaningful comparisons).

"Kids Ain't Us"

Despite majority support for the more conservative solutions to the problems of children, few gave high marks to the Bush administration's handling of children's welfare issues. More than 80 percent of all sources criticized the President's efforts. For example, Children's Defense Fund President Marian Wright Edelman criticized the President's budget, saying it, "... has chosen to ignore last year's message of hope and continue the budgetary neglect of the 1980's." *(Washington Post* 1/3) Similarly, Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-MO) contradicted the administration's assertion that its new plan was revolutionary: "Had the founding fathers adopted this definition of revolutionary change, America would still be a part of England." (CBS 4/18)

Administration Handling



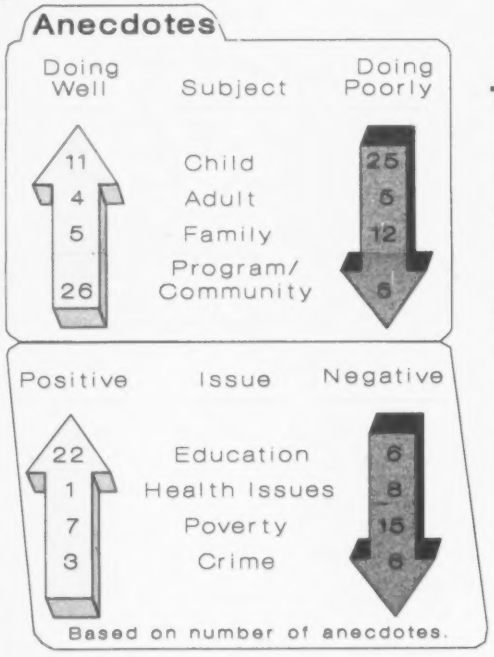
Based on opinions by news sources.

Intimate Moments

Coverage of children's issues focused on individual experiences as well as more abstract policy debates. The news frequently humanized this story through personal vignettes and anecdotes that illustrated broader issues or social concerns. Although descriptive in tone, such anecdotes may impart a moral about the needs of children and the effectiveness of social and political programs designed to meet those needs.

Almost 25 percent of all stories contained such anecdotes. In fact, 40 percent of ABC's coverage included some anecdotal discussion. The news media used anecdotes both to dramatize the problems of children and to illustrate potential solutions. The struggles of children (36 anecdotes) and families (17 anecdotes) were the most frequent subjects of downbeat vignettes. For example, the *Washington Post* reported on a young product of the city's foster care system. Having spent time in five foster families, eight-year-old Kevin was found one day climbing into a trash can. According to *Post* reporter Tracy Thompson, "Asked what he was doing, the boy said he was worthless and wanted to be thrown away." (2/7)

By contrast, anecdotes featuring programs or community activities (31 anecdotes) were seen sunny side up. Thus, ABC highlighted a Missouri program designed to teach parenting skills. One expert declared, "Any program that reaches the parents at a critical time and gives those parents a sense of being important to the child is going to change that child's future." Driving home the program's effectiveness, Rebecca Chase reported, "Missouri has found that starting early is paying off. Test scores are up, child abuse is down, but perhaps the most long-lasting result is that parents who get involved early, stay involved." (ABC, 4/3) As this story illustrates, successful educational experiments were the most frequent source of upbeat anecdotes. Conversely, downbeat anecdotes usually focused on the problems of poverty, crime, and inadequate health care.



Blaming The System

Although anecdotes about education focused mainly on positive experiences, debate over the state of the present educational system was markedly negative. Among the 17 sources who evaluated education in America today, 82 percent found the system wanting, either in absolute terms or in comparison with other countries. For example, columnist George Will charged, "Never has the nation been safer, and never before has the nation been graduating students less well educated ... Today the principal threat to America is America's public education establishment." (*Washington Post* 6/2)

Doubting Thomas

Initial Media Coverage of Supreme Court Nominee Clarence Thomas

Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas's initial media coverage has been more negative than Robert Bork's was at a comparable stage of his 1987 confirmation battle. We coded all evaluations of Judge Thomas that appeared in 157 news stories from the ABC, CBS, NBC and CNN evening newscasts, the *Washington Post,* and the *New York Times*, from his July 1 nomination through August 15. We also coded separately all 35 editorials and op-ed pieces that ran in the *Post* and *Times* during this period.

Among all 337 evaluations of Thomas by news sources, three out of five (60%) were negative. Sample positive: "the best man for the job." (George Bush, *Washington Post*, 7/2) Sample negative: "an extremist who is out of step with the Bill of Rights." (NOW official, NBC, 7/6)

By comparison, Bork's pre-hearing assessments in 1987 were evenly balanced between positive and negative assessments. (*Media Monitor*, 9/87) Although most sources condemned Bork's conservative philosophy, a majority praised his judicial abilities. But most sources have criticized both Thomas's ideology (88% negative) and his abilities (58% negative). Only his personal background, i.e. his rise from poverty to prominence, has consistently received plaudits.

Judge Thomas's press was mainly negative at all seven media outlets analyzed. But he fared worst - roughly two to one negative - at the big three networks and the *New York Times*. The coverage was more balanced at the *Washington Post* and on CNN. Among sources, his praise came mainly from the Bush administration and Congressional Republicans. Opposition was varied most frequently by Congressional Democrats, civil rights groups, and women's groups. Finally, he fared better in the opinion pages than the news sections. In both the *Times* and the *Post*, a majority of evaluations in opinion articles favored Thomas.

Judging Clarence Thomas

	Percent Positive	Number of Evaluations
News Stories	40%	337
Opinion Articles*	54	65
Outlet		
ABC	34	35
CBS	36	28
NBC	33	24
CNN	44	34
Washington Post	46	113
New York Times	36	103
Sources		
Blacks	41	96
Whites	60	108
Republicans	93	57
Democrats	29	42
Civil Rights Groups	19	77
Women's Groups	0	37
Topics		
Personal Background	93	15
Fitness/experience	42	79
Ideology (general)	12	25
Views on abortion	25	12
Views on civil rights	17	35
Views on individual rights	0	12

*Print editorials and op-ed pieces. All other figures are evaluations by sources in news stories.

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Media Monitor

Center for Media and Public Affairs • 2101 L Street, NW • Suite 405 • Washington, D.C. 20037 202-223-2942

Volume V Number 8 October 1991

The Trials of Clarence Thomas

Media Coverage of Judge Thomas' Confirmation Battle

We analyzed media coverage of the Clarence Thomas confirmation battle both before and after Anita Hill's charges of sexual harassment were made public. From Thomas's selection on July 1 until October 5, we examined 442 news items, including 156 stories on the ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN evening newscasts; 192 news stories in the *Washington Post, New York Times, Time, Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report*; and 94 opinion articles in those print outlets. For the next nine days, from Professor Hill's public charges through the October 15 Senate vote, we examined 99 TV evening news stories and 124 news articles in the *Post* and *Times*.

Major findings:

■ **The Verdict** Before October 5, a majority of sources disapproved of Judge Thomas in both news and opinion pieces. *Page 3*

■ **A Matter of Race?** Most black sources criticized Thomas; most white sources praised him. *Page 4*

■ **Rags to Robes** Sources panned Thomas's abilities and beliefs but praised his background. *Page 4*

■ **No Winners** President Bush and Senate Democrats each got worse press than Thomas did. *Page 5*

Hill vs. Thomas

■ **Battle of the Sexes** After October 5, four out of five male sources praised Judge Thomas, but three out of four female sources criticized him. *Page 6*

■ **Split Decision** Most sources praised Professor Hill personally, but three out of four rejected her allegations. *Page 6*

Media Monitor (Copyright 1991) is published ten times a year by the Center for Media and Public Affairs, a nonpartisan and nonprofit research organization. The Center conducts scientific studies of how the media treat social and political issues. Yearly individual and organizational subscriptions are available.

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This month's *Media Monitor* examines Clarence Thomas's rocky road to his Supreme Court confirmation. Our report is divided into two sections. We begin by examining Thomas's coverage from his nomination through the initial Senate hearings. Then we examine separately the final nine days of coverage from the disclosure of Professor Anita Hill's charges of sexual harassment until the final Senate vote.

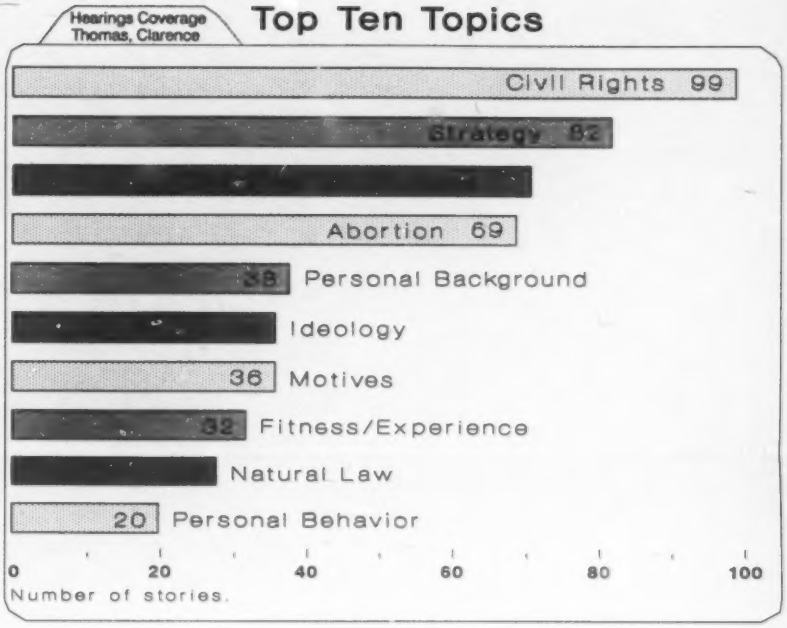
Under the Spotlight

Even before Anita Hill raised the issue of harassment, the Thomas story was big news. From his selection on July 1 through October 5 (when Hill's allegations were made public), the four main TV networks ran 156 stories on Thomas during their evening newscasts, with a combined airtime of 4 hours 16 minutes. CNN led the pack, with 50 stories totalling 1 hour 13 minutes, followed by ABC with 41 stories (59 minutes), CBS with 36 stories (64 minutes), and NBC with 29 stories (60 minutes).

Researchers also examined 192 print news stories on Thomas: 80 each from the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, along with 32 news articles from the three major news magazines--six from *Time*, 12 from *U.S. News & World Report*, and 14 from *Newsweek*. In addition, we coded 94 opinion pieces on the Thomas nomination: 57 from the *Post*, 34 from the *Times*, two from *Newsweek*, and one from *U.S. News*.

The Thomas File

Civil rights was the leading topic of the Thomas debate. It was featured in 99 news stories, mostly during the summer, as civil rights groups debated whether to oppose Thomas's confirmation. Another 82 stories dealt with the strategies of Thomas's opponents and supporters, with much of the attention focusing on a television commercial aired by a group of Thomas supporters.



Leading Sources

	Number of Stories
Individuals	
Clarence Thomas	157
George Bush	57
John Danforth (R)	50
Joseph Biden (D)	46
Howard Metzenbaum (D)	41
Orrin Hatch (R)	31
Patrick Leahy (D)	30
Howell Heflin (D)	29
Edward Kennedy (D)	21
Herbert Kohl (D)	19
Groups	
NAACP	130
NOW	47
Conservative Victory Comm.	32
People for the American Way	19
NARAL	18
American Bar Association	18

By September the confirmation process itself became a major issue, with 71 stories focusing on the performance of both the nominee and the Judiciary Committee. As the hearings progressed, abortion eclipsed civil rights as the central policy issue; nearly two-thirds of the 69 abortion stories appeared after Labor Day. A second tier of topics included such issues as Thomas's personal background (38 stories) and his views on natural law (28 stories). Stories on Thomas's fitness and experience were featured in only 32 stories, with most reports focusing on his tenure at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Speaking Out

The media were equally likely to quote Thomas supporters and opponents. Among nearly 1500 partisan sources, 752 were linked to the Administration, other Republicans, conservative interest groups or Thomas himself. A nearly identical 746 sources were affiliated with Senate Democrats, other Democrats, and liberal interest groups. The individuals with the highest profiles were Thomas and his chief backers, President George Bush and Senator John Danforth. The remaining top sources were all members of the Judiciary Committee, and all but one (Orrin Hatch) were Democrats. Democratic committee members averaged 23.4 citations, to 14.3 quotes per Republican member.

Liberal interest groups were quoted nearly four times as often as their conservative counterparts (329 to 83). The only conservative group to appear frequently was the Conservative Victory Committee, whose negative TV ad sparked controversy in early September. The NAACP, National Organization for Women, People for the American Way, and the National Abortion Rights Action League were among Thomas's most publicized opponents. The media also sought advice from legal scholars, especially law school professors, who made 72 appearances to state their views. Black conservatives, a relatively obscure group before Thomas's selection, received a burst of attention as they were quoted 25 times.

Judging the Judge

Among the 766 opinions expressed in news stories about Thomas prior to October 6, four out of seven (57%) offered criticism or opposition. Editorials and op-ed articles featured an almost identical tilt--54 percent negative. Thomas did better in the *Post*'s op-eds than in the *Times*'s (only 53% negative in the *Post*, compared to 61% in the *Times*). Another difference: the editors of the *Post* endorsed Thomas for the Court, while the *Times* eventually opposed his confirmation. This editorial split was reflected in news articles: While coverage of Thomas in the *Post* was mainly balanced, he received praise from fewer than

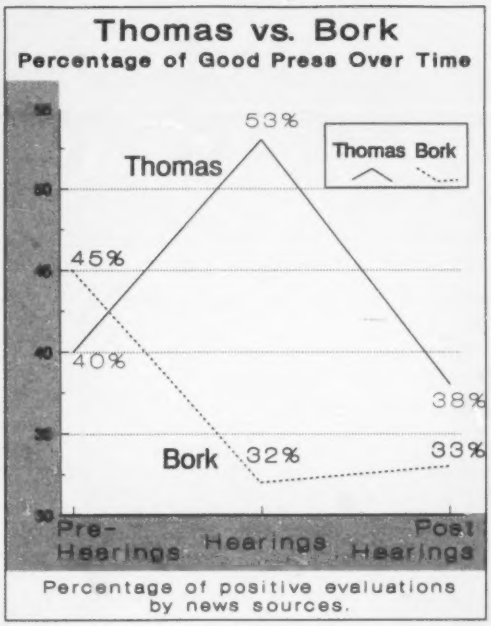
Judging Clarence Thomas

	Percent Positive	Percent Negative	Total Evals
News Stories	43%	57%	766
Opinion Articles*	46	54	175
Outlet			
ABC	38	62	64
CBS	40	60	50
NBC	41	59	49
CNN	45	55	69
Washington Post	49	51	239
New York Times	39	61	240
News Magazines	44	56	55
Topics			
Personal Background	95	5	42
Fitness/experience	42	58	153
Ideology (general)	15	85	54
Views on abortion	21	79	29
Views on civil rights	20	80	51
Views on individual rights	0	100	17
Confirmation Performance	31	69	98
Sources			
Blacks	39	61	172
Whites	54	46	332
Republicans	94	6	128
Democrats	29	71	189
Civil Rights Groups	19	81	99
Women's Groups	0	100	63

*Print editorials and op-ed pieces. All other figures are evaluations by sources in news stories.

two out of every five sources (39%) in the *Times*. Overall, Thomas received his most positive coverage in the *Post*. His evaluations on ABC, CBS, and NBC tended to mirror those in the *Times*, while CNN's debate (55% negative) virtually matched that of the three news magazines (56% negative).

Thomas received his best press (95% positive) on his personal background, especially his rise from Pin Point, Georgia to the federal bench. For example, the *Post* quoted Senator Orrin Hatch as saying, "I have to tell you, Judge Thomas, I am so doggone proud of you I can hardly stand it." (9/12) By contrast large majorities of news sources criticized both Thomas's fitness and his philosophy. Nearly three out of five news sources (58%) assailed Thomas's capacity for the job, including ratings of his intellectual fitness and his past government service. An even greater percentage (69%) criticized Thomas's performance at his confirmation hearings. NARAL President Kate Michelman complained on NBC, "He has stonewalled every Senator, every question, refusing to answer on the question of whether there is a constitutional right-to-choose." (9/11)



The criticism of Thomas's beliefs was more intense. The various aspects of his philosophy were opposed by 82 percent of sources, with most attention going to his views on abortion and civil rights. Typical was AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland's statement on ABC, "The President's apparent resolve to make the Court the preserve of the far-right wing leaves us with no choice but to oppose Judge Thomas." (7/31)

Evaluations of Thomas also differed according to the race of those quoted. A majority of white sources (54%) supported Thomas. By contrast, more than three out of five African-American sources (61%) rejected Thomas. For example, black legal scholar Derrick Bell, told ABC that "to place a person who looks black and who, in conservative terms, thinks white, is an insult." (7/1)

Did the coverage affect public opinion? Gallup polls show that the proportion of those favoring Thomas's confirmation remained steady from July through September, at just over 50 percent. But his opposition rose from 17 to 25 percent, as the undecideds apparently broke against him. Black opposition to Thomas grew the most--in September, 32 percent of African-Americans opposed Thomas's confirmation, compared to only 18 percent opposed in July. This shift occurred as the media reported mostly criticism of Thomas by black leaders.

Back to Bork

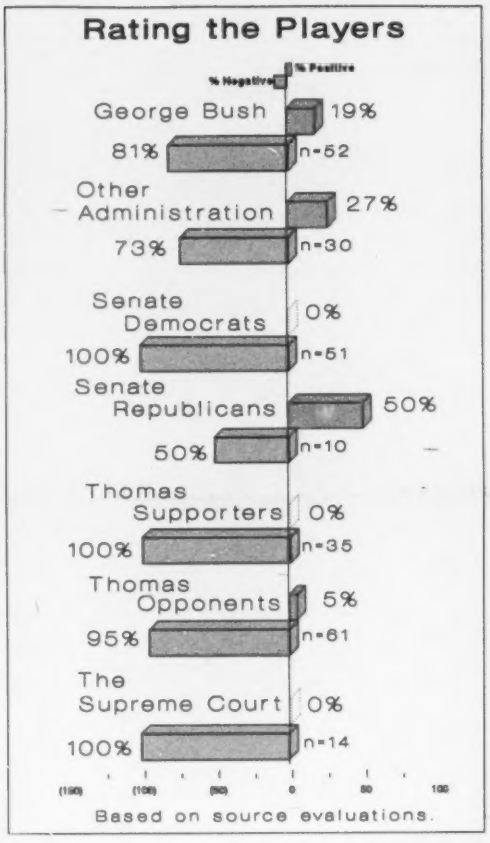
Since Robert Bork's 1987 confirmation battle, Supreme Court confirmation battles have been fought in the media as well as the Senate. We compared media coverage of Thomas this year to that of Bork four years ago (*Media Monitor*, October 1987). Overall, Thomas fared better than his predecessor (57% negative evaluations, compared to 63% negative for Bork). Thomas, however, encountered negative coverage from the start; Bork's press remained relatively favorable until his Senate Judiciary Committee hearings. Bork's hearings, however, proved his undoing, as two out of three sources (68%) criticized him from that point forward. For Thomas, his hearings were one of his better moments--a majority (53%) of sources praised Thomas during the week he testified, although his press score later slipped, as Senators and others voiced dissatisfaction with his testimony.

Bork and Thomas fared equally poorly when it came to ideology, as 82 percent of sources criticized their respective conservative philosophies. Bork was seen as the more qualified; a majority (51%) of sources praised his qualifications, while 58 percent criticized Thomas on that score. Thomas's main asset was his background. The 95 percent positive ratings Thomas received on that score were enough to boost his media image above that of Bork.

Here's Mud in Your Eye

Opponents and supporters of Judge Thomas not only disagreed over his confirmation, they also criticized each other. For example, 81 percent of sources criticized Bush's handling of the Thomas nomination. Yet the president's press was better than most. Key Senators, the Judiciary Committee, the White House, and even the Supreme Court were all roundly criticized by news sources.

Senate Democrats came in for some of the roughest treatment, with no sources providing praise, compared with 51 statements of criticism. For example, NOW's Patricia Ireland charged that "the Reagan-Bush Republican court-packing strategy could not have been accomplished without the active complicity of the Democrats in the Senate." (NBC, 7/6) Senators Joseph Biden and Edward Kennedy were the judiciary panel members singled out for the most criticism, mainly as the result of a negative television ad prepared by the Conservative Victory Committee. Repeated clips or citations of their ad provided nearly half of the Democrats' negatives. In response, news sources dished back 32 negative evaluations of the ad's creators.



Round 2 -- Anita Hill

Anita Hill's charges of sexual harassment triggered new interest in the Thomas story and led to saturation television coverage. From October 6 until the October 15 Senate vote, the four network evening newscasts ran 99 stories on the sudden scandal, in addition to the many hours of live coverage of the hearings. In nine days the evening news shows aired 4 hours 8 minutes of coverage of the Thomas story, nearly surpassing the total coverage given to Thomas during the prior three months. We also coded 63 news stories in the *New York Times*, and 61 in the *Washington Post*--an average of about seven stories per day for each paper.

While the specifics of the Hill-Thomas dispute drew the most attention, the media struck up broader themes as well. More than a third of the stories (78) also dealt with criticisms of the Senate's confirmation process. And 48 stories (an average of more than five per day) focused on the issue of sexual harassment apart from Hill's own story.

Hill v. Thomas

The centerpiece of the coverage was, of course, the dispute between Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas. Surprisingly, both individuals received more praise than criticism: 63 percent positive comments for Hill, and 58 percent positive for Thomas. On CBS, CNN, and in the *Washington Post*, the accuser received better press than the nominee, while they

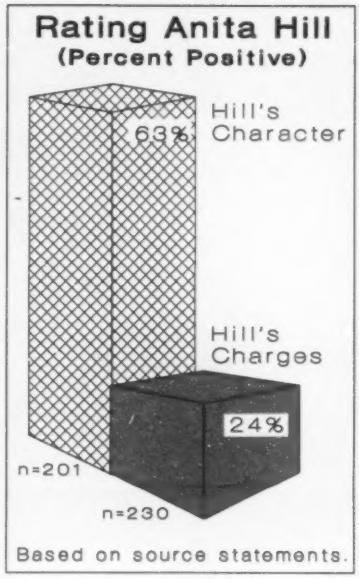
Hill vs. Thomas
(Percent Positive Evaluations)

	Hill	Thomas
Total	**63%** (n=201)	**58%** (n=375)
ABC	64	64
CBS	77	57
NBC	50	48
CNN	74	58
Washington Post	58	52
New York Times	63	64
Pre-hearings	81	57
Hearings	53	59
Males	54	81
Females	75	26
Whites	61	77
Blacks	55	36
Democrats	93	69
Republicans	12	90

Based on source statements in news stories.

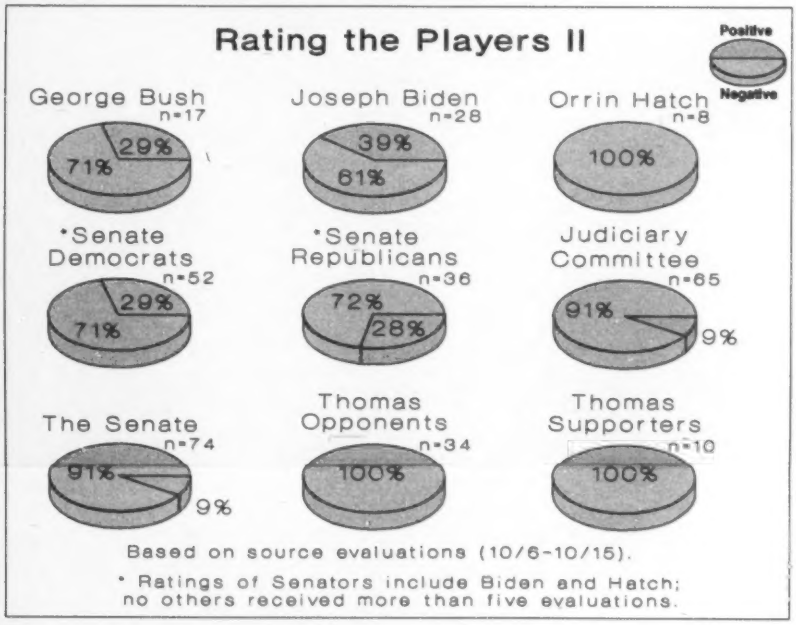
were treated about equally on ABC, NBC, and in the *New York Times*. Still, Thomas's proportion of good press during this final phase was higher than at any other point in his confirmation quest. Most Democrats muted their criticism, while some, such as Bennett Johnston (D-LA), proffered support: "The question is who is telling the truth and I simply believe it was overwhelmingly in favor of Judge Thomas." (CBS, 10/15)

The media presented a gender gap in evaluations of the two main participants. Judge Thomas received mainly praise from news sources identified as males (81% positive) and criticism from female sources (74% negative). Professor Hill received far more praise from female sources (75% positive) than she did from males (54% positive). Even if Hill's and Thomas's own statements are removed, the gender gap persists, with Thomas's proportion of good press 18 points higher among men, and Hill's 8 points higher among women.



Professor Hill fared better among blacks as well as women. A majority of sources identified as African-American (55%) praised Hill, while nearly two out of three (64%) criticized Thomas. For example, the *Times* quoted one woman, "There are so many educated, just stellar lawyers who are African-American in this country that I am embarrassed that President Bush put someone up there who he knew had skeletons in the closet." (10/14) Both Hill and Thomas were given mainly positive comments from white sources, although Thomas (77% positive) did better than Hill (61% positive).

While Anita Hill received mainly favorable press, her charges against Thomas were greeted with skepticism. Although 63 percent of news sources praised Hill personally, more than three out of four (76%) expressed doubt or outright hostility towards her allegations. Thus, CBS quoted her old high school teacher praising her character: "This girl's for real. Anything she says you can take to the bank because it will be the truth." (10/10) But EEOC official Rosalie Silberman criticized her story in the *Times:* "She misinterpreted him. She heard something she wanted to hear." (10/12)



All Fall Down

Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill both fared far better in the press than the other players in this media drama. Among the two most visible Senators, Joseph Biden (D-DE) was criticized six times out of ten; Orrin Hatch's (R-UT) media profile was 100 percent negative. Overall, committee Republicans and Democrats each attracted more than 70 percent negative judgments.

The institution fared even worse than individual members. Nine out of ten sources criticized both the Judiciary Committee and the Senate as a whole. Law professor Mary Frances Berry charged, "We are outraged that the Senate is not taking seriously charges of sexual harassment against a black woman." (*Post*, 10/8) She was seconded by NARAL's Kate Michelman: "I'm taken aback by how incredibly difficult it's been to get them to understand." (*Post*, 10/9) The nominee himself provided his own critique of the Senate. Comparing the hearings to a "high-tech lynching," Thomas charged that he was "a victim of this process." (*Times*, 10/12)